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The Nature of the Corredemptive Merit of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Rev. Gabriel M. Roschini, O.S.M.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Undoubtedly one of the most prolific modern writers on the Blessed Virgin, Father Gabriel M. Roschini is an internationally-famous Mariologist. Founder and editor of *Marianum*, one of the first scientific international Marian magazines, a member of the International Pontifical Marian Academy, one of the most ardent promoters of international Marian Congresses, author of innumerable scientific and popular texts, books, and articles on Mary, he has influenced the course of Mariology and Marian devotion in the present century as have few of his contemporaries.

The present article, although written seven years ago (*Marianum* 15 (1953), 277-287), retains its timeliness, since it is a penetrating discussion of a question which is much debated by present-day Mariologists. It represents an attempt to preserve the best in conflicting opinions about Mary's meritorious role in the redemption of mankind.

A partial list of Father Roschini's writings follows. The English titles are all translations from the Italian.

Consecration to Mary Immaculate
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The Nature of the Corredemptive Merit of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Rev. Gabriel M. Roschini, O.S.M.

SUMMARIUM: Breviter exposita historia quaestionis circa naturam meriti corredemptivi B.M. Virginis, A. refert recentes quasdam solutiones. Propriam vero mentem circa hanc vexatam quaestionem aperiendo haec ostendit: 1) quaestio circa naturam meriti corredemptivi est magis de verbis quam de re; 2) modi dicendi de congruo et de condigno sunt manifeste insufficientes; 3) meritum corredemptivum Deiparae rectius, cum S. Bonaventura, meritum de digno dicitur, dum meritum redemptivum Christi rectius meritum excellentiae appellatur. Terminis de congruo et de condigno rectius meritum simplicium fidelium designatur.

1. HISTORY OF THE QUESTION.

All those who admit in the Blessed Virgin Mary a true Corredemption, also admit a true merit of the graces of redemption. They do not, however, agree in determining the nature of such merit and, in particular, the precise term with which to designate it.

Down to the 17th century Theologians limited themselves to pointing out the cooperation of the Blessed Virgin in the Redemption *ad modum meriti* (thus Eadmer, John Tauler, Ambrose Catharinus). Only in the 17th century did they begin to determine the nature of such corredemptive merit, to the extent that the axiom: « The Most Blessed Mary merited for us *de congruo* what Christ merited *de condigno* », became very

(1) BALIĆ, C., O.F.M., *Die sekundäre Mittlerschaft des Gottesmutter (Hat Maria die Verdienste Christi de condigno für uns mit verdient)*, in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 4 (1937) p. 1-22. - COLOMER, O.F.M., *Coopération*, in *Est. Mar.*, 2 (1943) p. 155-177. - CUERVO, E., O.P., *La gracia y el merito de María en su cooperación a la obra de nuestra salud*, in *Ciencia Tomista*, 57 (1938) p. 87-104, 204-223, 507-543; 58 (1939) p. 305-337. - FERNANDEZ, A., O.P., *De mediatione B. Virginis secundum doctrinam S. Thomae*, in *Ciencia Tomista*, 38 (1928) p. 164. - GRABIC, O.F.M., *Theologicae considerationes de natura mediationis B. M. V.*, in *Collectanea Franc. Slav.*, Acta II Congr., 1937, p. 22 ss. - LEBON, J., *La B. Vierge Marie, médiatrice de toutes les graces*. Extract from periodical *Vie diocés.*, July and December, 1921. - *Comment je conçois, j'établis et je défends la doctrine de la médiation mariale*, in *Eph. Theol. Lov.*, 16 (1939) p. 655-744. - LLAMERA, M., O.P., *El mérito maternal corredentivo de María*, in *Est. Mar.*, 10 (1951) p. 83-140.

frequent at that time. The first to formulate such an axiom seems to have been the celebrated Ferdinand Quirinus de Salazar, S.J., in the year 1621 — and, substantially, in 1618. Following him came Pere Poiré, Bernard of Grotta Minerva, Francis van Hondeghem, Thomas F. Urrutigoyti, Francis Guerra (who asserts that it is the « common » opinion of Theologians), Diego de Celada, Gaspar Tausch, Christopher de Vega, George de Rhodes, Bartholomew de los Rios, Placid Mirtus Frangipane, John Baptist Novati, Agnellus Scipione, etc. ⁽²⁾. The first one, in that 17th century, to speak of the sole possibility of a *de condigno* redemptive merit seems to have been John Martinez de Ripalda († 1648); the first, however, to teach not only the possibility, but also the fact, of such a merit, would seem to have been Christopher de Ortega († 1686). The 17th century writers who uphold the *de congruo* merit are Salvator Montalbano, Joseph Galiffet, Emmanuel Martinez de Barrio, John Baptist van Ketwig, Eusebius de Leon Gomez, St. Alphonsus M. de Liguori, John A. Nasi. Only two, in that century, maintained the *de condigno* corredemptive merit: the Franciscans, Charles del Moral and Dominic Lossada ⁽³⁾.

In the 19th century, among those who upheld the *de condigno* merit, are Jamar (who qualifies the renowned *effatum* as « common assertion of Theologians »), Depoix, Petitalot, De la Boise, Herrmann, Coppola, Alibrandi, Guida, Legnano, Harte, etc. ⁽⁴⁾. Nothing is known, as regards this century, of any upholder of the *de condigno* merit.

In the 20th century, the assertion of the celebrated *effatum* made by Blessed Pius X in the Encyclical, « Ad diem illum », is well known. Among the Theologians who maintained the *de congruo* merit we may note E. Hugon, Cardinal Lépicier, Cardinal Mercier, Zubizarreta, Sinibaldi, Kerkofs, Merckelbach, Barrigou-Lagrange, Alastruey, Keuppens, Dillenschneider, Bernard, etc., etc.

⁽²⁾ See the texts in CAROL, *De Corredemptione* B. M. V., p. 486, s.

⁽³⁾ Cfr. CAROL, *l. c.*, p. 488.

⁽⁴⁾ Cfr. CAROL, *l. c.*, p. 488.

2. RECENT SOLUTIONS.

In the present century there is no lack of theologians who have felt the need of thoroughly examining the problem of the corredemptive merit of the Blessed Virgin. It would seem that the first was the celebrated Louvain patrologist, Joseph Lebon, who, on the basis of the maternal association of Mary with her divine Son, attributes to her a common *de condigno* corredemptive merit, originating not from the grace of Christ, but from the grace of God ⁽⁵⁾. This, as the author himself confesses, brought about « a pretty raising of shields » (*l. c.*, p. 720). Another attempt to resolve the problem was that made by Fr. Anthony Fernandez, O.P., defending the view that the Blessed Virgin, as head and co-head of the human race, or, in other words, by force of her participation in the capital grace of her Son, merited our salvation with a *de condigno* merit ⁽⁶⁾. This attempt, in its turn, did not have any better reception. Despite this, it stimulated Fr. Emmanuel Cuervo, O.P., to attempt a straightening of the path opened by Lebon and Fernandez, laying down, as foundation of the *de condigno* redemptive merit, not Mary's participation in the capital grace of Christ (that is, in His notion of head) but the social character of the Blessed Virgin's grace, by force of her universal association with Christ in the work of our Redemption ⁽⁷⁾. This thesis of Fr. Cuervo's won over almost all the Spanish Mariologists ⁽⁸⁾ among whom García Garcés, Bover, Sauras, Colomer, Vacas, Basil of St. Paul, etc. Besides these Spaniards, Bittremieux, Balić, Grabić, etc., have pronounced in favour of the *de condigno* merit. A profounder and more accurate review of the problem of the corredemptive merit of the Blessed Virgin is that made by the Dominican theologian

(5) Cfr. *Comm. je conçois, j'établis et je défends la doctrine de la médiation mariale*, in *Eph. Theol. Lov.*, 16 (1939) p. 655-744.

(6) Cfr. *De mediatione secundum doctrinam Divi Thomae*, in *Ciencia Tomista*, 37 (1928) p. 145-170.

(7) Cfr. *La gracia y el mérito de María en su cooperación a la obra de nuestra salud*, in *Ciencia Tomista*, 57 (1938) p. 87-104, 204-223, 507-543; 38 (1939) p. 305-337.

(8) Cfr. *Ciencia Tomista*, 63 (1942) p. 204.

of genius, Fr. Marcellianus Llamera, who submits the positions of Lebon, Fernandez and Cuervo to an acute criticism. With regard to Lebon, Fr. Llamera rejects the idea of the double grace of the Blessed Virgin established by the former; the *gratia Christi* for her personal sanctification, and the *gratia Dei* for her social, corredemptive mission. This distinction — Fr. Llamera observes — is unfounded and unsuitable, since if the corredemptive grace is independent of the grace of Christ, in what way is the Corredemption subordinate to the Redemption and dependent on the same? Christ would not be, in reality, the one and only Redeemer. With regard to Fernandez, Fr. Llamera admits, substantially, his theory on the capital grace of Mary in so far as it is « universal regenerative grace », but he denies it the denomination of capitalty and co-capitalty. Finally, with regard to Fr. Cuervo, Fr. Llamera recognises the soundness and efficacy of his argumentation in favour of the *de condigno* merit; he recognises that it is necessary, in such a question, to take as starting point the analogy between the mediative acts of Christ and the mediative acts of Mary, between the being itself of Christ and the being itself of Mary. While admitting this, Fr. Llamera asks himself: « What analogy is this? » And he replies by asserting and proving that « the divine-spiritual maternity is the essential constitutive of the being and of the mission of Mary ». This established, just as the grace of Christ is and is called « capital grace », so the grace of Mary is and is called « maternal grace », since it has for its end the supernatural regeneration of men. This character of « maternal grace » distinguishes Mary's grace both from that of Christ, which is *capital*, and from that of all Christians, which is in itself *individual* and not social nor, much less, maternal. Now, just as the « capital grace » of Christ includes and reduces to unity all the virtualities and characteristic aspects of Christ with respect to men, so also the « maternal grace » of the Blessed Virgin includes and reduces to unity all the virtualities and characteristic aspects of Mary with respect to men. One of the virtualities of this « maternal grace » of Mary — concludes Fr. Llamera — is precisely her *de condigno corredemptive merit*. The general argument to prove his assertion is this: « the spir-

itual maternity or maternal grace stands to the corredemptive merit of Mary as the capitality or capital grace stands to the redemptive merit of Christ.» Now Christ, by force of His capitality, merits *de condigno* (*absolute*) the grace of the human race. Mary, therefore, by force of her spiritual maternity, merits *de condigno* (*ex condignitate*) the grace of the human race. The particular argument, then, is enunciated thus: «in the maternal merit of Mary are found the three conditions required for condignity of merit, that is to say: 1) the most perfect and sufficient grace, by reason of the *fulness* required by her double maternity; 2) the moral representation of the whole human race (as New Eve and universal mediatrix), being the merit of the «Woman», that is, of the Mother of all living things through which it comes about that in her maternal grace is virtually included the grace of all; 3) the divine-intrinsic ordination or grace, that is, of her maternal grace, to the acquiring of the salutary grace of all, just as the life of the mother is ordered to the life of her children. This ordination is called *divine* since the Blessed Virgin has received from God her maternal mission and her maternal grace. The *de congruo* corredemptive merit — concludes Fr. Llamera — is irreconcilable with the spiritual maternity of Mary, which is reconcilable only with *de condigno* merit. Just as *de condigno* merit proceeds from the sufficiency, from the representation, from the ordination of the maternal grace of Mary to the grace of her children, so also the *de congruo* merit would be founded on the defect of sufficiency, of representation and of ordination of the grace of the Blessed Virgin to the grace of all men, and therefore she could not be called spiritual Mother of all. It is therefore a question — concludes Fr. Llamera — of a *maternal condign* corredemptive merit, distinct from the *capital condign* merit of Christ and from the simply *filial congruous* merit of all others. This theory has been strenuously defended by Fr. Llamera in the name of the Spanish Theologians of the Mariological Society, in the «8th International Marian Congress», of 1950, on the 30th October of that year, in the Aula Magna of the Antonian Pontifical Atheneum.

3. MY OWN MODEST OPINION.

All things considered, and taking into account the various elements brought forward by the different Theologians in the solving of this thorny problem, by own modest opinion can be summarized in the following points:

1. The question of the nature of the corredemptive merit of the Blessed Virgin is more a question of *name* than of *concept*: « quaestio magis de verbis quam de re ». In fact, all those who admit a corredemptive merit, intend to admit also a true and proper corredemption, that is to say, an immediate cooperation on the part of Mary in the so-called objective Redemption, in the acquisition of all graces. This is precisely what those who defend the *de congruo* merit wish to express. Similarly, those who admit the *de condigno* merit also wish to express this, as in the case of the remarkable expression of it by Fr. Llamera, with whom, as regards the concept, it does not seem possible to disagree. Which of the two contrasting terminologies expresses in the happiest manner this common concept, admitted by all or, at any rate, admissible by all: the first (*de congruo* merit), or the second (*de condigno* merit)? In my modest opinion, neither the one nor the other. If the nature of the corredemptive merit of the Blessed Virgin has been, and is still, so much discussed, this is due to the terminology, of which not a few of the disputant theologians have felt and have also expressed the inadequacy and imprecision ⁽⁹⁾.

2. In effect, both the upholders of the *de congruo* corredemptive merit and the upholders of the *de condigno* corredemptive merit, manifest an evident dissatisfaction with the terms they use. Thus, for example, those who adopt the term *de congruo*,

⁽⁹⁾ Thus, for example, Fr. GARCÍA GARCÉS thought that the polemics on such a problem « es una disputa típica nacida de la deficiente terminología » (cfr. *Los estudios meriológicos en nuestros días*, in *Est. Mar.*, 1 [1942] p. 379). Bittremieux held the same view (in *Eph. Theol. Lov.*, 8 [1931] p. 422-436). Fr. Bover likewise wrote: « El problema de la condignidad o congruidad de los meritos de María creemos se ha embrollado lamentablemente por deficiencia de términos apropiados; es, en parte, cuestion mas verbal que real » (*María Mediadora universal*, Madrid, 1943, p. 313 e 316-7).

feeling that they are saying too little, strive to obtain something augmentative, calling it merit of *the highest congruity* (Friedhoff), *congruous in the highest degree* (Alastruey), of the *supercongruous* (Keuppens), *de congruissimo*. - This same uneasiness in the use of terms is manifested also in the upholders of the *de condigno, ex condignitate*, corredemptive merit. The term *condignity*, in fact, etymologically, as Cajetan pointed out (In 1-2, q. 114, a. 3), signifies *of equal dignity*. Now, this *equality of dignity* is *fully* verified only when there is equality or adequacy not only between the meritorious work and the reward, but also between the person meriting and the person rewarding: something which is evidently lacking in the Blessed Virgin. This is evidently apparent in the case of satisfaction for sin which, by reason of the person offended, has a morally infinite malice, and therefore calls for a satisfaction of infinite value. Thus, for example, Fr. Llamera, in order to defend the *de condigno* corredemptive merit, is constrained to distinguish a double *de condigno*: one absolute and one relative or partial ⁽¹⁰⁾; the former is that of the Redeemer, the latter, instead, is that of the Corredemptrix. He dare not, therefore — through evident preoccupation to avoid the equivocation — speak of *de condigno simpliciter* corredemptive merit, but is constrained to specify it by adding another term: *de condigno ex condignitate*.

Here is evident the dissatisfaction with the simple term *de condigno*, just as is equally evident, in the other examples already given, the dissatisfaction with the simple term *de congruo*. The equivocation which lies at the root of the whole thorny question and which has caused the uneasiness in its terminology seems to me to be precisely this: that to having wished to apply to the redemptive merit of Christ and to the corredemptive merit of Mary the same identical terminology laid down in the tract, *de Gratia*, for distinguishing the common-

(10) In absolute, or total, *de condigno* merit, there is proportion both between the one meriting and the rewarder, and between the meritorious work and the reward; it is the redemptive merit of Christ. In relative, or *secundum quid*, or partial *de condigno* merit, on the other hand, there is proportion only between the meritorious work and the reward, not however between the person meriting and the person rewarding: it is the corredemptive merit of the Blessed Virgin.

merit of Christians, that is, the terminology *de condigno* and *de congruo*. Christ and Mary, in fact, constitute an order to themselves. Treating, therefore, of entirely different merits, precision of terminology called for entirely different terms. Leaving, therefore, to the common merit of the faithful, the expressions *de condigno* and *de congruo*, we shall try to find other terms capable of expressing the nature both of the redemptive merit of Christ and the corredemptive merit of Mary. That having been established, another question arises spontaneously: if the terms *de congruo* and *de condigno* applied to the corredemptive merit of the Blessed Virgin appear insufficient, in themselves, without additions which specify them, to express the nature of such merit, is it not perhaps necessary or, at least, highly useful, to put aside these two — in themselves — inadequate terms, and to find some other which fully expresses, by itself, the nature of the corredemptive merit of the Blessed Virgin? An affirmative reply to this precise question seems to be beyond all doubt. Everything depends, therefore, on finding such a term. The criterion for finding it seems to me to be this: it must be sufficient to distinguish exactly, by itself, without need of additions, the corredemptive merit of Mary, both from the redemptive merit of Christ and from the common merit of Christians. That established, we ask ourselves: does there already exist a term which fully corresponds to the above criterion, or is it necessary to coin one? In my modest opinion such a term already exists and needs only a greater specification: it was coined with genius by the Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure, and has already been hailed or at least considered with sympathy by some illustrious Mariologists. What is this term?

3. St. Bonaventure very often distinguishes a threefold merit: *condign*, *worthy* and *congruos* ⁽¹¹⁾: 1) Merit is *de condigno* when the reason for reward is found there full and perfect, so that there may be a certain adequacy between the merit and the reward ⁽¹²⁾. This merit, to which corresponds justice, is true

(11) Cfr. 1 S., d. 41, a. 1, q. 1, Op. I, 729 ab; d. 27, a. 2-3, Op. 2, 663-668; 3 S., d. 4; a. 2, q. 2, Op. 3, 107 b; 3 S., d. 18, a. 1, q. 2, Op. 3, 383 C, etc.

(12) 2 S., d. 27, a. 2, q. 2, Op. 2, 664.

and proper merit, merit *simpliciter*, while any other is only *secundum quid* ⁽¹³⁾. — 2) Merit *de digno* is that in which there is a certain worthiness with regard to that to which that dignity is ordered. In this merit is less of the notion of *condignity* (at least fully), although it is superior to simple merit *de congruo* ⁽¹⁴⁾. *De congruo* merit is that in which there is a certain disposition of congruity with respect to that to which such a disposition is ordered, there being also less of the notion of *condignity* ⁽¹⁵⁾. Exemplifying this, the Seraphic Doctor expresses himself thus: « *De congruo* merit is found when the sinner does that which is in his power, for himself. *De digno* merit is found when the just man does something for another. *De condigno* merit is found when the just man does something for himself, since to that is ordered *de condigno* grace; this, however, is ordered to merit grace for others, since the sinner is unworthy of any good at all; however, seeing that it is a *worthy* thing that the just man should be graciously heard, such an operation is not ordered to such grace by sole congruity » ⁽¹⁶⁾. The Seraphic Doctor teaches that the corredemptive merit of the Virgin (that which is ordered to the salvation of men) was a *de digno* merit ⁽¹⁷⁾.

This Bonaventuran terminology did not displease Bittremieux ⁽¹⁸⁾. It also pleased Fr. Bover, who proposed to call the merit of Mary *dignum*, that of Christ *supradignum*, and that of the others *infradignum* ⁽¹⁹⁾. In a particular manner it pleased

⁽¹³⁾ 1 S. 41, d. 41, a. 1, q. 1, corp., Op. 1, 729 b.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Op. 1, 730, ad. 4.

⁽¹⁵⁾ 2 S., d. 27, a. 2, q. 2, Op. 2, 665 a.

⁽¹⁶⁾ « Meritum congrui est, quando peccator facit quod in se est et pro se. Meritum digni, quando justus facit pro alio. Meritum condigni, quando justus operatur pro se ipso, quia ad hoc ordinatur gratia ex condigno; ad gratiam autem alteri promerendam non omnino ex condigno, quia peccator omni bono est indignus; nec solum ex congruo, quia justus dignus est exaudiri » (1 Sent. d. 41, a. 1, q. 1, Op. 1, 729 a).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Cfr. DI FONZO, L., *Doctrina S. Bonaventurae de universali mediatione B. Virginis Mariae*, Rome, 1938, p. 72, 87 ss.

⁽¹⁸⁾ « Non immerito forsitan Mariae meritum, propter eminentiam sui valoris, termino ex S. Bonaventura mutuato, diceretur meritum digni, dum meritum Christi condigni et aliorum congrui appellaretur » (Eph. Theol. Lov., 8 (1931) p. 436).

⁽¹⁹⁾ *Maria, Mediadora universal*, Madrid, 1946, p. 313 and 316-17.

Fr. Di Fonzo, who declared that the terminology proposed by St. Bonaventure, used properly, could conciliate the opposite opinions of Theologians with regard to the corredemptive merit of the Blessed Virgin, that is to say, whether it is *de condigno* or *de congruo*. (*Op. cit.* p. 90 s.). However, it seems to me that the Bonaventuran terminology ought to be completed and made more precise. It ought, above all, to be specified exactly, giving an ampler sense to the term *de digno*. In fact, according to the Seraphic Doctor, *de digno* merit is something midway between *de condigno* and *de congruo* merit. Yet it seems that to the corredemptive mission of Mary cannot be denied a corredemptive merit of a certain condignity, namely, that which saves the equality and adequacy between the meritorious work (the corredemptive merit) and the reward (the salvation of the human race), not merely the adequacy between the person meriting and the person rewarding. The term *de digno*, taken thus, by force of its own etymological significance, expresses exactly, *by itself*, the identical reality which Fr. Llamera expresses with two terms, of which the second is a kind of corrective of the first: *de condigno ex condignitate*, or *de condigno relativo, secundum quid*, or partially *de condigno*. With regard, then, to Christ's merit, it seems to me that the term *de condigno*, even with the addition of *absoluto*, or *ex toto rigore justitiae*, is not sufficient to express it in all its transcendent significance. The redemptive merit of Christ, in fact, not only saves the equality or adequacy between the one meriting and the one rewarding (two infinite persons) and between the meritorious action and the reward, but is a superabundant merit, of infinite value, caused by the infinity of the person of Christ. It is a question, therefore, of a most singular, *par excellence*, merit, for the expression of which seems to be most apt the expression of redemptive merit *par excellence*: « *meritum excellentiae* ». In such a way the terms merit *de condigno* and merit *de congruo* would serve to express in a well determined manner, in the tract « *de Gratia* », the nature of the merit of simple Christians, mystical members of Christ; *de digno* merit — worthy, that is, of the singular mission of a true corredemptrix (and therefore fruit of a social grace) would serve to express, unequivocally, the nature of the cor-

redemptive merit of the Blessed Virgin; and the term *merit of excellence* (« *meritum excellentiae* ») would serve to express the most singular, transcendent nature of Christ's merit. When the thorny terminological question of the nature of Mary's cor-redemptive merit is placed and resolved in such a manner, it seems to me that a further disagreement, even *merely of words*, between the upholders of the *corredeptive* merit of the Blessed Virgin, is impossible.

GABRIEL M. ROSCHINI, O.S.M.

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